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Dear Neighbors,

This has been an enormously challenging session. Developing the three budgets for this state, Operating, Capital and Transportation, are typically difficult tasks. This year the debate over how to spend taxpayers' dollars was intensified due to spiraling health care costs, the funding of the two school initiatives, and the loss of revenue resulting from I-695. The policy issues we faced were equally challenging: a new primary system, shorelines protection, school accountability, and traffic congestion. The February 28th earthquake, impending drought, and energy crunch served to increase our already sizable work load.

As this is written, we are very frustrated that the Legislature has not yet finalized its work on many of the above issues. However, significant progress has been made in all areas. We expect that by the time you read this newsletter, we will be finished with our work in Olympia for this year. A follow-up newsletter will be sent to you later this summer giving you details about the legislative decisions that are still pending as we go to press.

We're proud to serve as your 32nd District representatives in Olympia. We're working together to help improve our schools, our communities and our state government. Please contact use with your concerns and comments.

Carolyn Edmonds Ruth Kagi



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Message from Carolyn

Addressing the energy crisis

The year began with an energy shortage caused partly by California's deregulation fiasco, a drought and a lack of investment in new power generation. In December, out-of-state companies exploited the shortage to charge up to \$5,000 for energy that cost \$30 a year ago. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission could end this crisis tomorrow by enforcing federal law that requires "just and reasonable" energy prices, but it won't act.

We can make Washington more energy independent by increasing power supplies and energy efficiency. We passed a balanced energy strategy that includes clean, renewable power and conservation. The package will:

- Reform energy siting to bring more power on-line quickly.
- Diversify energy supplies by requiring utilities to give customers a choice of buying power generated by solar, wind or other renewable sources.
- Enable older generators to produce more energy without producing more air pollution, through tax incentives for pollution control.
- Make government consume less energy by requiring energy audits and energy efficiency in state agencies and schools.
- Provide millions of dollars of energy assistance to low income families.

Due to lack of agreement in the evenly-divided House, we were unable to pass more far-reaching legislation on conservation and renewable energy resources. Nor were we able to have the Legislature join the governor in asking the president to order enforcement of existing federal laws mandating that energy prices be just and reasonable. We believe, however, that this energy package is a good foundation on which to build sound future policy.

Caring for our elders and disabled

Last year I visited long-term care facilities across the state. I talked with residents, their families, administrators and the workers who care for our disabled and elderly. It was amazing and impressive to see the compassion and dedication of the caregivers I met. But a good heart isn't enough. Long term care workers are paid less than many fast food workers. To maintain the high standard of care our disabled and elderly deserve we must attract and maintain high quality workers. Doing so requires providing thorough training, liveable wages and opportunities for advancement.

I designed a plan to give long-term workers what they need most – a \$ 1 per hour raise, access to coverage under the Basic Health Plan and free classes at community colleges on a space available basis. I found broad consensus, inside and outside the Legislature, that these improvements are necessary and long overdue.

At this writing money has not been found in the budget to fund my proposal. However, I am optimistic that a small wage increase for some caregivers will be included in the final operating budget. That will be a welcome first step, but far short of meeting the need. I will continue to work on this issue through the summer.

In addition to addressing the worker shortage, there are other improvements we can make in our long term care system. I was successful this session in passing needed reforms in our state's procedures guiding the inspection and oversight of our long term care facilities. SHB1461 made permanent a program that offers technical assistance to improve the quality of care in boarding homes. SHB2041 streamlined the inspection process for boarding homes and adult family homes. SHB1320 increases the required qualifications for adult family home providers. All three bills have been signed by the governor.

Protecting our environment

Most of the work this session in the Local Government and Housing Committee involved playing defense. Several bills were introduced to repeal significant environmental laws, including repeal of the new shorelines guidelines. Issues I have been working for include extending the deadlines for local governments to complete required updates to their comprehensive plans, Critical Area Ordinances and shoreline guidelines. I am also working for funding for the updates. At this writing we are close to agreement.

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Transportation – the road to recovery

Finding solutions to our traffic congestion continues to be a very high priority for us this session. The Blue Ribbon Commission (BRCT), a bi-partisan, citizens task force, presented its recommendations to the Transportation Committee. Several bills were developed from the BRCT recommendations dealing with government efficiencies, accountability, permit streamlining and regional planning. Thus far three efficiency measures have been signed into law: permit streamlining, allowing cities and counties to purchase rights-of-way in advance and design-build for major projects.



Mid-point in the special session, in an effort to break Legislative gridlock over the state's transportation dilemma, House Democrats presented a proposal that would put the state's system of roads, ferries and public transportation on the road to recovery.

The key elements of our plan include a commitment by the state to fund transportation projects of statewide significance, a sizeable commitment to transportation alternatives such as transit, and authority for regions to plan and fund their own transportation projects.



Our regional funding plan would allow the Central Puget Sound and other metropolitan regions – as well as any county in the state – to partner with the state and federal governments to target new transportation funding to the most difficult problems. Our plan:

- requires voter approval of a new congestion relief district, local option transportation taxes, and projects to be funded
- allows King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties to work together to address their congestion problems
- creates no new bureaucracy, but works with county executives or county commission chairs, mayors and the Transportation Secretary to create regional plans that are sent to the voters
- allows regions to seek voter approval for a variety of local option taxes, including a sales tax on vehicles and related equipment; private and commercial vehicle license fees; fuel tax; tolls; sales and use tax on fuel; and mileage charges.



As of this writing, the transportation issue is still in negotiation. Much progress has been made, but we are still struggling to reach agreement.

Rep. Ruth Kagi

Message from Ruth

A Fair Deal for Foster Kids

One of my priorities this session was to ensure that foster kids in our state get a fair deal. Children in foster care deserve the best care we can provide, but the current system lacks continuity in service delivery and accountability. This means that kids in crisis are not being adequately supported.

There is no one, single remedy to fix all the gaps in foster care. There are a number of changes that are needed to improve the quality of care provided to every foster care child. The Legislature passed a bill this session that commits us to achieving these changes through national accreditation for our child welfare services.



Accreditation requires a comprehensive analysis by each local office of how children are assessed, placed and treated. Foster parents and birth parents must be consulted regarding decisions affecting foster children. Each office must compare its policies and its work against national best practice standards, and then be reviewed by a national team to determine if they meet these standards. Accreditation will help us hold the agency accountable. The Washington Legislature is the first in the nation to direct its child welfare agency to meet these high standards.

The Legislature also provided significant funding in its budget for foster care:

- to recruit and train more foster care parents;
- for better respite care, reimbursement rates, and support for foster parents;
- to lower caseloads and establish clear outcome goals for foster children and families.



Getting smart on crime

The last newsletter summarized a bill I introduced to reduce penalties for non-violent drug offenders, and to invest the savings into drug treatment and drug courts. Although a companion bill passed the Senate, it does not appear that either bill will pass the House this session. I will continue to work on this issue in the interim, and undoubtedly will

reintroduce the bill next year. I have greatly appreciated the feedback I have received from constituents regarding this important policy proposal and look forward to continuing the discussion.



Giving voters a new primary system

Last year the Supreme Court struck down California's blanket primary system, which is fashioned after Washington's. The Court said that the parties have the right to control the choice of their own nominees, and that the blanket system violates that right.

Washington's Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties sued to change our primary.



It is the Legislature's responsibility to provide a new primary plan – one that is acceptable to both the courts and voters. We believe that the plan should protect voter confidentiality and ensure that every vote counts. We will continue to seek a responsible solution to this dilemma and to break the deadlock on this issue.



Strong support for public schools

The House K-12 budget is a strong proposal that fully funds I-728 and provides nearly \$800 million in new funding. The budget focuses on improving teaching and leadership in schools, continuing educa-



tion reform, and strengthening accountability efforts. The Senate budget put funding into the Better Schools Fund, but cut many of the policy initiatives proposed by the House, and elimi-

nated the block grants. Negotiations continue.

Following is a summary of the proposal put forward by the House:

- Increasing per-student spending from the current level of \$5009 per year to \$5315 in 2002 and \$5484 in 2003.
- Spending \$10.225 **billion** for K-12 education in the 2001-03 biennium - an increase of \$766 million, or 8.1%. This is an increase of about **\$5000 per classroom**.
- Providing \$300.5 million for the 2001-03 cost-of-living pay increases for teachers and staff.
- Giving struggling schools **targeted assistance**, and asking them to be **accountable** for student achievement.
- Providing new funding for mentoring beginning teachers, leadership training for principals, expanding the math corps, and strengthening science curriculum.
- Emphasizing school safety by providing \$11.8 million for **security and safety** measures and for **anti-bullying** training for teachers and staff.
- Spending \$5 million to continue the highly-effective **Reading Corps** program.
- Maintaining full funding of the block-grants for schools.

Helping low-performing schools

Our district is fortunate to have outstanding local schools and teachers, but this is not the case everywhere. When some schools consistently turn in poor results, we must intervene to help them succeed because the stakes are too high to tolerate failing schools.

We believe low-performing schools must be held accountable and given help to improve student learning and achievement. We supported a plan to identify schools and districts where a large percentage of students consistently fall short of state standards and notify them that they must develop – with help – comprehensive plans to turn themselves around or face penalties or incentives, such as revising personnel assignments or restructuring.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to reach agreement with the Senate on this important part of our school improvement efforts.

Preventing school bullying

Too many young people experience bullying and harassment in our schools. A recent study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that nearly 1 in 3 middle- and high-school students is either a victim, a bully or both. As we seek to reduce violence in our schools, we are closely examining the connection between bullying and violent outbursts such as school shootings.

House Democrats worked to require schools to establish a plan to reduce bullying and harassment. Unfortunately, key House Republicans did not agree that these anti-bullying policies were necessary and killed the bill.



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Hail and Farewell

The end of session brings changes to our office. Our Legislative Assistants for the past 2 years, Maren Norton and Sara VanMeter, are leaving. Maren and Sara have served us and the residents of the 32nd District with dedication, good humor and tireless energy. The reputation our office enjoys for quality service is due in large part to the efforts of Maren and Sara. Both are leaving us to attend law school. Maren has been admitted to the University of Michigan and Sara will attend Seattle University. We wish them every success in their chosen field.

We also welcome our new Legislative Assistants, Ritva Manchester and Sonja Jacobsen. Ritva comes to us after many years in service to our community, including PTA and Shoreline Schools Foundation Board Member. She has strong cognitional skills, deep ties to our community and is enthusiastic about this new opportunity. Sonja recently graduated from Wellesley College and worked this session as a Session Aide to Senator Julia Patterson. She brings to our office knowledge and experience working with the legislature and community organizations. We are excited about having Ritva and Sonja joining our staff.



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